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ABSTRACT

This publication highlights statistics showing the progress made during the past quarter-century in educating children with disabilities. It also includes data showing how much more needs to be done to prepare all students with disabilities for a productive and independent future. Part 1 discusses sources of the statistics and the key role of the federal government in expanding educational opportunities. Part 2 summarizes positive trends in special education based on 16 indicators, and Part 3 discusses future challenges. The information indicates: (1) the goal of ensuring access to public education for students with disabilities has largely been met; (2) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has been a major force behind this progress, but credit is also due to parents and educators and changing attitudes toward students with disabilities; (3) a solid infrastructure is now in place for educating students with disabilities; (4) it is time for special education to look beyond ensuring access as an endpoint and focus on improving educational quality for students with disabilities; (5) standards-based reform in general education has created new challenges for special education; and (6) it is time to rethink both the requirements and funding levels of IDEA. (Contains 17 references.) (CR)

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Twenty-Five Years of

EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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THE GOOD NEWS AND THE WORK AHEAD

2002

AMERICAN YOUTH POLICY FORUM
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Our goal is to enable policymakers and their aides to be more effective in their professional duties and of greater service—to Congress, the Administration, state legislatures, governors and national organizations—in the development, enactment, and implementation of sound policies affecting our nation's young people. We believe that knowing more about youth issues, both intellectually and experientially, will help them formulate better policies and do their jobs more effectively. AYPF does not lobby or take positions on pending legislation. We work to develop better communication, greater understanding, and enhanced trust among these professionals, and to create a climate that will result in constructive action. For more information about these activities and other publications, visit our web site at **www.aypf.org.**

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Credits

Several people helped to develop this publication. They include Nancy Kober, a freelance writer and consultant to CEP who served as lead writer; Jack Jennings and Diane Rentner of CEP; Betsy Brand and Rafael Chargel of AYPF; and Gerry Cohen, independent writer.

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education.

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This publication may be freely cited, provided the source is identified as *Twenty-Five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead* (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy, 2002). To obtain additional copies, contact AYPF or CEP (see back cover for contact information). A pdf version of the publication is also available at www.aypf.org or www.ctredpol.org.

Twenty-Five Years of EDUCATING CHILDREN with DISABILITIES

The Good News and the Work Ahead

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1975, the nation took a bold step to improve education for children with disabilities, a group whose needs had been woefully neglected. That year, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, a landmark federal law that eventually came to be known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This 1975 legislation laid out the rights of children with disabilities to attend public schools, receive free services designed to meet their unique needs, and learn in regular education classrooms with non-disabled children to the greatest extent possible. It also authorized federal funds to cover some of the costs of these special services.

After 25 years, a body of evidence has accumulated about the long-term effects of this national commitment to special education. Recently, the American Youth Policy Forum and the Center on Education Policy reviewed data from objective and reliable sources about progress in educating children with disabilities. This report summarizes what we learned about accomplishments in this area and the critical work remaining. The report is aimed at people who may not be aware of these facts. This story deserves to be communicated more widely, because the well-being of all Americans is linked to the education of the 11% of school children who have disabilities.

What we found can be broadly summarized in this way: By several measures, the 25-year effort to improve education for children with disabilities has been remarkably successful. By other measures, it has not gone far enough.

The Good News

Good news can be found on several fronts—from the growing number of children with disabilities being educated in regular classrooms to the rising numbers attending college. Before presenting specific data on progress, we offer three broad observations to give readers a context for understanding the detailed data in this report.

Broad observations . . .

1. **The goal of ensuring access to public education for students with disabilities has largely been met.** Children with disabilities have moved in massive numbers from institutions, home education, or no education to their neighborhood public schools. They have gone from learning in segregated environments to learning in regular education classrooms with non-disabled peers. Disabilities are being identified at a younger age, and many more infants and toddlers are receiving early intervention services.

2. **The IDEA has been a major force behind this progress, but credit is also due to parents and educators and to a general change in people's attitudes about children with disabilities.** The legal protections of the IDEA were instrumental in spurring states and school districts to change their policies and classroom practices—changes that probably would not have occurred with a less far-reaching and assertive statute. But the IDEA did not exist in a vacuum. Momentum also came from the parents who pressed schools to follow the law when children with disabilities were not being adequately served, and to the teachers and administrators who worked hard to make the law succeed with less federal funding than expected. Such diverse forces as court decisions, the civil rights movement, and federal anti-poverty programs also helped to raise citizens' awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.

3. **A solid infrastructure is now in place for educating children with disabilities.** A system exists for identifying, evaluating, and serving children with disabilities beginning at birth. Special education teachers are more numerous and better integrated into school operations, and they know much more

than they did two decades ago about effective ways to teach children with disabilities. Principals and regular education teachers are also more familiar with special education issues, procedures, and teaching methods.

The specific accomplishments in educating children with disabilities can be summarized as follows:

The good news . . .

- **Numbers served.** Three decades ago, more than a million children with disabilities received no educational services at all. Untold numbers of students had disabilities that were never detected or were incorrectly diagnosed. Today, about 6.5 million children with disabilities have been identified and are receiving special education services.

- **Access to public education.** Thirty years ago, only 1 out of every 5 children with disabilities was educated in a regular school. Today, the overwhelming majority of children with disabilities—about 96%—learn in regular schools with non-disabled children, rather than in state institutions or separate facilities.

- **Inclusion in regular classrooms.** Three-quarters of students with disabilities now spend at least 40% of their day in a regular education classroom with non-disabled peers, instead of in separate rooms. Almost half of the students with disabilities spend at least 80% of their day in regular classrooms.

- **Services for children ages 0 to 2.** The number of infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services for developmental delays or other disabilities has increased more than sixfold in the past 25 years.

- **Participation in standardized testing.** More students with disabilities are participating in the same state and national standardized testing programs as other students. In almost two-thirds of the states, the average scores for students with disabilities on state tests have risen or remained stable during the past few years.

- **High school graduation.** High school graduation rates for students with disabilities have gone up slowly but steadily in recent years.

- **College enrollment.** College enrollment rates among students with disabilities have more than tripled in 20 years. In 1978, just under 3% of college freshmen reported that they had a disability, while in 1998, the figure was over 9%.

- **Employment rates.** Young adults with disabilities are employed at a higher rate than their older counterparts who didn't have the benefit of the IDEA. Young people with disabilities who earn a college degree now fare nearly as well in the job market as non-disabled college graduates.

- **Teachers.** The special education teaching force has more than doubled in two decades. And the ratio of pupils with disabilities per special education teacher has been reduced from 21 pupils in 1977 to 16 pupils in 1994.

- **Parent involvement.** Thirty years ago, parents of children with disabilities had little say in how their child would be educated. Now, more than 85% of parents of children with disabilities in preschool and elementary school are actively involved in planning their child's individualized services and making other educational decisions.

- **Attitudes and empowerment.** Children with and without disabilities have learned to respect each other, cooperate, and appreciate each individual's worth. Young people with disabilities are better prepared to participate fully in and contribute meaningfully to society.

The Work Ahead

A candid look at the challenges, gaps, and problems in special education reveals several areas where the national effort has not gone far enough. To put these challenges into context, we offer three broad observations about the work ahead.

Broad observations . . .

1. **It is time for special education to look beyond ensuring access as an endpoint and focus on improving educational quality and results for students with disabilities.** Now that children with disabilities have access to regular education classrooms, the next step is to focus more attention on the knowledge and skills they are learning and the quality of preparation they are receiving in those classrooms. Much work remains to be done to ensure that all students with disabilities receive a high-quality education that prepares them for postsecondary education, good jobs, and a productive and independent life.

2. **Standards-based reform in general education has created new challenges for special education.** The idea that students with disabilities should be held to the same standards and tests as other students sends a powerful, positive signal. But requirements that link promotion and graduation to performance on high-stakes tests could harm students with disabilities. It will take intensive academic support for students, professional development for special education and regular education teachers, and other interventions to help students with disabilities meet academic standards and participate meaningfully in the general curriculum.

3. **It is time to rethink both the requirements and funding levels of the IDEA.** The procedural requirements of the IDEA have been instrumental in ensuring access for students with disabilities. But these requirements place considerable paperwork and time demands on teachers and administrators. And when legal conflicts between parents and schools become very contentious, this can overshadow educational goals and be counterproductive for children. Completing the work ahead, such as raising achievement and improving outcomes for students with disabilities, may be better accomplished with a different balance of policy approaches. It will also require a greater federal contribution; states and localities can't be expected to bear the costs of the work ahead alone.

Key challenges and needs in special education can be summarized as follows:

The work ahead . . .

- **Academic preparation.** Students with disabilities achieve at significantly lower levels, on average, than their non-disabled peers. They are held to lower expectations and are less likely than non-disabled students to take a full academic curriculum in high school.

- **Minority over-representation.** African American students are referred to special education at higher rates than their share of the overall population.

- **High school completion.** Only 55% of students with disabilities leave high school with a standard diploma, compared with three-fourths of the general student population. Young people with disabilities still drop out of high school at twice the rate of their peers.

- **Postsecondary education.** Young people with disabilities are less likely to go on to postsecondary education than non-disabled students, and those who start college are less likely to finish.

- **Low employment rates.** Young people with disabilities have less secure futures. Only 50% of working-age adults with disabilities were employed in 1997, compared with 84% of non-disabled adults.

- **Teacher shortages and needs.** Many school districts are struggling to fill shortages of special education teachers. Regular classroom teachers do not feel well prepared to address the special needs of students with disabilities. Many special education teachers are overwhelmed by paperwork and time demands related to federal requirements.

- **Technology.** Many students with disabilities who could benefit from assistive technologies do not have access to them. And barriers such as inadequate teacher training impede students with disabilities from using internet technologies.

The past 25 years of special education show what Americans can accomplish when we set a goal and direct our energies toward achieving it. If we approach the work ahead with the same energy and sense of purpose, we can look forward to another 25 years of impressive progress in the education of children with disabilities.

Part 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Purpose and Organization of This Report

Education reform has become a common topic of discussion among policymakers, the media, and citizens everywhere. States and school districts are setting high standards for student learning and implementing new testing and accountability systems in order to raise achievement for all students and improve the quality of public education.

Only occasionally do these discussions focus on children with disabilities. Most Americans don't pay much attention to special education unless they are a parent, teacher, or friend of a child with a disability. The special education issues that seem to get reported and discussed most often pertain to costs, lawsuits, or the limited number of high-profile disciplinary problems. Although most citizens are probably aware that children with disabilities are being educated in the same classrooms as non-disabled children, they may not realize how far the nation has come, in a little over a generation, in educating children with disabilities. Also, many people hear about the challenges of special education, but relatively few are aware of the accomplishments.

Highlighting the Facts about Special Education

This report highlights a variety of statistics showing the progress made during the past quarter-century in educating children with disabilities. It also includes data showing how much more needs to be done to prepare all students with disabilities for a productive and independent future. The intent is to bring this information in digestible form to policymakers, parents, classroom teachers, reporters, and others who don't usually read studies of special education. A related goal is to give policymakers a context for making future decisions about special education.

The American Youth Policy Forum and the Center on Education Policy collaborated to produce this report. We analyzed and synthesized objective, reliable data from a variety of national sources. We tried to be balanced in addressing the accomplishments and candidly noting the shortcomings.

We undertook this analysis because the year 2000 marked the 25th anniversary of a landmark federal law guaranteeing educational rights to children with disabilities. This 1975 law was originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, but many people also knew it by its law number, Public Law 94-142. In 1990 (Public Law 101-476), the name of the law was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, and that is how it is typically known today. After 25 years of federal involvement in special education, a body of evidence has emerged about the long-term effects of this commitment. It is a good time to take stock.

This project is an extension of an earlier effort by AYPF and CEP to summarize progress in general education over the past two decades. These findings were reported in our 2000 publication, *Do You Know the Good News About American Education?*

Who Are Students with Disabilities and What Is Special Education?

Over 11% of all public school students receive special education services. The population of students with disabilities is incredibly diverse. Children with disabilities served through federal special education programs range in age from birth through 21. They have a wide variety of needs and disabilities, from mild to severe. About half of the total population of students with disabilities consists of children with specific learning disabilities, and another one-fifth consists of children with speech/language impairments. Other disabilities recognized in federal law include mental retardation, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, visual impairments, autism, deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and developmental delay.

Although some people tend to think of special education as a self-contained system or a "place" within a school, this is not the case today. "Special education" means a set of services and activities specially designed to help children with disabilities succeed.

Why Special Education Is Everyone's Concern

Another motive for this report is to help people recognize that we all have a stake in ensuring that students with disabilities receive a high-quality education.

The reasons why . . .

- **Children with disabilities attend schools in all types of communities—rich and poor, Southwestern to Northeastern, and urban, suburban, and rural.** Children with disabilities are our brothers and sisters, friends and relations, neighbors and classmates. Our nation cannot expect to have a first-rate educational system unless we pay adequate attention to this significant percentage of the school population.

- **New state and federal reforms have set benchmarks for raising the achievement of *all* students, including those with disabilities.** Schools and districts are being held accountable for improving the performance of all subgroups of students. Children with disabilities are being held to higher expectations, and are required to participate in the general curriculum and assessments to the extent appropriate. Many students with disabilities will need additional services to meet these benchmarks.

- **Federal, state, and local governments spend a significant amount on special education.** Precise data on expenditures are difficult to collect, but experts have estimated total annual expenditures for special education to be anywhere from $30-60 billion. Citizens need to know whether their tax dollars are making a difference.

- **The nation's economic vitality and competitiveness depend on all citizens, including people with disabilities, being well-educated.** If our nation is going to prosper, we can't afford to waste the potential of any young person. Individuals with disabilities represent an important pool of talent, yet many remain underemployed or unemployed.

- **Our democracy is based on the values of equality, individual worth, and the rights of every citizen to participate in and contribute meaningfully to society.** The IDEA has helped all Americans recognize the rights and capabilities of people with disabilities, and our society is stronger for it.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of Part 1 consists of two additional background sections:

- ***Data Sources and Limitations*** discusses the sources of the statistics used in this report, the gaps, limitations, and weaknesses of the database in special education, and the reasons why it's difficult to collect data in this area.

- ***The Federal Role in Special Education*** briefly reviews the state of special education before 1975 and describes the key role of the federal government in expanding educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

The major findings of the report are included in Parts 2 and 3, as follows:

- ***Part 2: The Good News about Educating Children with Disabilities*** summarizes positive trends in special education according to 16 different indicators. Each indicator includes a short factual statement of a key trend, a brief explanation of the issue, a summary of data in bullet form, and a table or graph illustrating that trend.

- ***Part 3: The Work Ahead in Educating Children with Disabilities*** discusses future challenges in special education according to 10 different indicators. Each indicator includes a short statement of a challenge or need, a brief discussion of the issue, a summary of data in bullet form, and a table or graph showing the work ahead in that area.

The report ends with two final sections:

- A ***Conclusion*** talks briefly about where the nation can go from here.

- ***List of References*** contains detailed citations for the main data sources used in this report.

Data Sources and Limitations

The data in this report are drawn from a variety of national sources and research studies. Sources for the trends highlighted in Parts 2 and 3 appear at the end of each indicator, and more complete citations for major data sources appear at the end of the report.

Sources Used in This Report

Most of the information comes from the U.S. Department of Education, in particular the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). This office is the main overseer of programs for children with disabilities and a funder of special education research. Each year OSERS publishes an Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These reports contain a wealth of data and discussions of current issues in special education.

Additional information comes from other federal agencies, among them the Census Bureau, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Labor, and the National Council on Disability (an independent federal agency that advises the President and the Congress). Other key information was obtained from periodic surveys and studies by nonprofit organizations and research centers. These include the surveys of college freshmen with disabilities done by the HEATH Resource Center; the surveys of state assessment and reform policies done by the OSEP-funded National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota; and the surveys of adults with disabilities conducted by the Harris Poll for the National Organization on Disability.

Gaps and Limitations in Special Education Data

Many key questions about special education can't be easily answered because we don't have good data. In such critical areas as the achievement of students with disabilities, the nature of their parents' involvement, and their adult employment rates, data are either unavailable, incomplete, unreliable, or difficult to obtain. This is not because government agencies and researchers don't recognize the need for better data, but because they face special challenges in collecting and reporting accurate and comprehensive data about people with disabilities. Federal and state agencies are trying to improve this situation. Through a series of studies funded by OSEP, more comprehensive data will become available over the next several years about the performance of students with disabilities and other major policy issues, such as finance, professional development, and IDEA implementation.

The trends described in this report use different baseline years and cover different time periods because those were the data available. Although 25 years is a useful benchmark, not all of the data used in this report go back that far, for reasons explained below. The recency of the data also varies, depending on which trend is being analyzed.

Some of the data challenges . . .

- **The diversity of students with disabilities and the individualization of their educational programs make it difficult to reach general conclusions.** Trends for students with disabilities vary greatly depending on such factors as severity of the disability. For example, high school graduation rates are much higher for students with specific learning disabilities than for students with autism. These differences limit how much one can generalize about students with disabilities. Some of the data cited in this report are broken out according to the 13 categories of disability in federal law. But this level of detail is not available or essential for every indicator.

- **Until quite recently, very few students with disabilities have participated in large-scale standardized achievement tests**. As a result, very little national data are available about the achievement of students with disabilities. Typically, large-scale assessments do not report the scores for students with disabilities as a subgroup, because the population is so diverse, the educational goals are so individualized, and the number of these test-takers is so small as to make average scores unreliable and not very informative.

- **Self-reported data about such issues as college graduation, employment, and earnings have limitations.** Census surveys and other surveys of adults with disabilities present special challenges. For example, if a survey asks adults whether they have a disability, the people responding may not be clear about what is meant by disability or impairment, or may be reluctant to disclose the extent or type of their disability.

- **Some key outcomes of special education may not be known until many years after a student leaves high school.** For example, youth with disabilities who dropped out of high school may later receive a GED. Youth who did not enroll in postsecondary education after high school may go to college several years later. Since students with disabilities often take longer to progress through the stages of education, adult surveys are an important strategy for capturing educational outcomes several years later.

- **Data that measure trends over time are scarce.** Data collection in the early years of special education was haphazard, and collection procedures were inconsistent. Definitions and categories of disabilities have changed over time, as has the wording of key survey questions. Very few studies in special education are longitudinal (meaning that they follow the same group of children over a period of years). All of these factors make it difficult to track trends over time, because earlier data may be non-existent or incompatible with later data. New longitudinal studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education will help fill these data gaps in future years.

- **Baseline years of data vary considerably.** On a few key issues, data are available from the 1970s, but for many key indicators, reliable data were not collected that far back. In other cases, data exist from the 1970s or 1980s but can't be compared to recent data because they were collected using different definitions or standards.

- **States have different capacities for collecting and reporting data.** Much of the federal data on children with disabilities come from the states, but states differ in the quality, accuracy, consistency, and recency of their data.

The Federal Role in Educating Children with Disabilities

The federal government has played a leading role in expanding opportunities for children with disabilities, but this did not happen in isolation. Momentum also came from parents, advocacy groups, and the courts, as well as from forward-thinking policymakers and educators at the state and local levels. Developments outside the field of education—most notably, the civil rights movement for minority citizens and the War on Poverty—also set the stage for federal action.

The Early State of Special Education

In the 1950s, at the urging of parents and other advocates, some states and school districts began to take steps to identify children with disabilities and provide funding for services to meet their special needs. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the federal government entered the field of special education with various laws that supported development of captioned films for the hearing impaired, provided funds to train teachers of children with mental retardation, and authorized grants to states to educate children with disabilities. In the 1960s and early 1970s, services to young children with disabilities became available through Head Start and other federal early childhood programs.

Despite these initial steps, many children with disabilities were still being denied access to an education in the early 1970s. More than 1 million children with disabilities were excluded from school, and hundreds of thousands were housed in state institutions. Those children with disabilities who did attend public schools were seldom allowed to mix with other children, and their education was often inconsistent or inappropriate. Unknown numbers of children had disabilities that were misdiagnosed or never detected.

Civil Rights and Court Cases

At the same time parents and advocates were pressing for federal legislation, they were also looking to the judiciary to advance the cause of children with disabilities, and lawsuits had been filed in several states. In the early 1970s, courts handed down key decisions that established the responsibility of states and localities to educate every child with a disability, based on the equal protection clause of the Constitution.

The movement to ensure the civil rights of African Americans also made people more aware of social justice issues, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act opened the door to similar guarantees for other groups. In 1973, Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the first major civil rights law for persons with disabilities. This law prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability and required school districts to educate children with disabilities in regular educational environments, unless such a placement could be demonstrated to be unsatisfactory.

The federal anti-poverty programs of the 1960s also helped to put equity issues onto the national agenda. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was a central component of this War on Poverty. This Act provided substantial federal aid to improve education for poor children, migrant children, children with disabilities in state-supported institutions, and other disadvantaged groups.

Thus, by 1975, events in education, the courts, and the larger society had come together to create a favorable climate for enacting a major disabilities law.

Significance of the IDEA

The 1975 law, now called the IDEA, marked a new federal commitment to identifying and educating children with disabilities. The IDEA is significant for several reasons:

- It mandates that all children with disabilities ages 3 through 21 receive a "free, appropriate public education" that meets their unique needs, regardless of the type or severity of their disability.
- It requires children with disabilities to be educated in the "least restrictive environment." This will vary depending on the needs of the individual child, but for most students with disabilities, it means being served in regular education classrooms with non-disabled children whenever possible. If a child with a disability needs supplemental services or accommodations to learn in a regular classroom, then the school and district must find ways to accomplish that.
- It requires schools to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for each student with disabilities, a document describing the education and related services to be provided to that student.
- It gives parents of children with disabilities certain rights in their child's education, including rights of notification, informed consent, due process, and involvement in decisions about eligibility, placement, IEPs, and other areas.
- It authorizes federal grants to states to help pay for the education of children with disabilities.

In the area of funding, the federal government has not lived up to its commitment to cover a substantial portion of the extra costs of carrying out the IDEA requirements. This refers to the extra cost for special services, such as special education teachers, personnel, and accommodations, beyond what states and localities already fund for all students. The law originally called on the federal government to pay for 40% of the extra costs of educating children with disabilities by 1982, but this promise has not been met. Although federal appropriations for special education have increased more than twenty-fold, from roughly $315 million in fiscal year 1977 to $7.4 billion in fiscal year 2001, these federal contributions cover only about 13% of the excess costs of special education. States and localities foot the rest of the bill.

The IDEA Today

Since 1975, the IDEA has been revised several times to meet emerging needs. Amendments to the law have expanded services to infants and toddlers with disabilities; required "transition planning" to better prepare young people with disabilities for postsecondary education, jobs, and independent living after high school; emphasized the need to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and expand their access to the general curriculum; and addressed other challenges. The 1997 amendments included the most significant changes to the law since 1975. These changes placed more emphasis on results for students; reduced the number of separately-funded research, training, and support programs for students with disabilities; and sought to reduce some of the paperwork and procedural complexity associated with federal requirements.

Another key federal law, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, strengthened the protections of children with disabilities from discrimination in schools and day care centers.

Implementing the IDEA has not been an entirely smooth path. The 1975 legislation required states and school districts to do things they had never done before and to contribute significant resources of their own to this effort. States and districts continue to struggle with competing pressures and complex issues, and teachers and

principals must invest considerable time and effort to comply with federal regulatory requirements. But this does not take away from the good work that has been done and the accomplishments documented in Part 2 of this report.

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), *Twenty-second Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, IDEA 25th Anniversary Web Site; U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Second Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of Public Law 94-142: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (Washington, DC: OSERS, 1980); and U.S. Department of Education, "Fiscal Year 2002 President's Budget" and "Fiscal Year 2001 Budget: Summary and Background Information," www.ed.gov.

Part 2

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The past quarter-century has seen major advancements in the education of students with disabilities. This section presents data on accomplishments in special education, using 16 different indicators. To help readers put these indicators in context, we offer three broad observations about progress in special education.

Broad observations . . .

1. **The goal of ensuring access to public education for students with disabilities has largely been met.** Children with disabilities have moved in massive numbers from institutions, home education, or no education to their neighborhood public schools. They have gone from learning in segregated environments to learning in regular education classrooms with non-disabled peers. Disabilities are being identified at a younger age, and many more infants and toddlers are receiving early intervention services.

2. **The IDEA has been a major force behind this progress, but credit is also due to parents and educators and to a general change in people's attitudes about children with disabilities.** The legal protections of the IDEA were instrumental in spurring states and school districts to change their policies and classroom practices—changes that probably would not have occurred with a less far-reaching and assertive statute. But the IDEA did not exist in a vacuum. Momentum also came from the parents who pressed schools to follow the law when children with disabilities were not being adequately served, and to the teachers and administrators who worked hard to make the law succeed with less federal funding than expected. Such diverse forces as court decisions, the civil rights movement, and federal anti-poverty programs also helped to raise citizens' awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.

3. **A solid infrastructure is now in place for educating children with disabilities.** A system exists for identifying, evaluating, and serving children with disabilities beginning at birth. Special education teachers are more numerous and better integrated into school operations, and they know much more than they did two decades ago about effective ways to teach children with disabilities. Principals and regular education teachers are also more familiar with special education issues, procedures, and teaching methods.

Indicator 1

Numbers of Children Served

Millions More Children with Disabilities Are Being Identified and Served.

Three decades ago, an estimated 1.75 million children with disabilities received *no* educational services. An uncounted but large number of students had disabilities that were never identified or were incorrectly diagnosed.

Today, states, school districts, and other agencies have intensified their efforts to identify children with disabilities at an early age and provide them with educational and related services tailored to their individual needs.

The good news . . .

- **Children with disabilities are being identified more accurately, appropriately, and at an earlier age.** The number of children with disabilities served under the IDEA has increased by about 75% in just over two decades. In 1977, about 3.7 million children with disabilities from birth through 21 years of age were receiving federally-supported special education services. In school year 1999-2000, almost 6.5 million children with disabilities were being served. The number served through the IDEA has increased at a faster rate than the overall school-age population.

- **Children who have any type of disability are more likely to be identified and served.** In 1977, about 8% of public school children had been identified as having a disability and were receiving special education services. In 1999-2000, this figure was over 11%.

Number of children with disabilities ages 0-21 served by federal special education programs

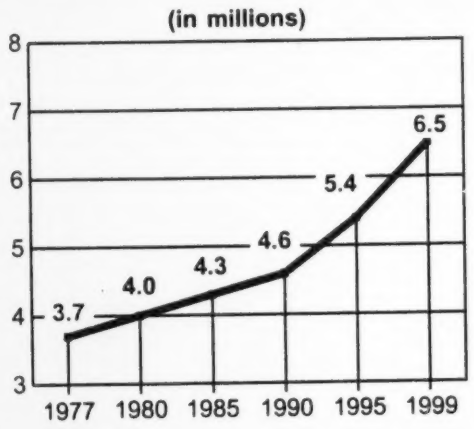


Chart sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000; and U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Data Analysis System, www.ideadata.org.

Other sources: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, House Report 94-332 (1975); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *The Condition of Education 1998.*

Indicator 2

Access to Public Education

The Vast Majority of Children with Disabilities Are Being Educated in Neighborhood Schools Instead of Separate Institutions.

Some thirty years ago, more than 1 million children with disabilities were excluded from public education. Many states had laws on the books that barred some children with disabilities from attending public schools, including those who were blind, deaf, emotionally disturbed, or labeled "feeble-minded."

Hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities were housed in state institutions or other facilities. Often these children received haphazard or limited educational services, and some lived in dehumanizing conditions. Some children of normal intelligence who had physical disabilities were placed in institutions for the mentally retarded because they had been misdiagnosed or because resources were unavailable to help them live at home or attend local schools.

For children with disabilities who *did* attend school, services were often inadequate or inappropriate for their needs, and expectations for learning were low. Many children with disabilities were educated in schools far from home or spent the whole day isolated from other children.

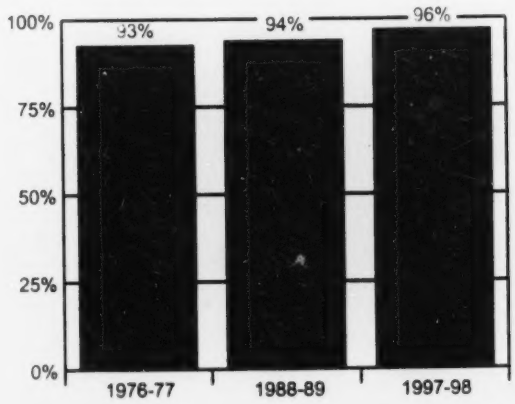
Today, students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education. The vast majority go to neighborhood schools with non-disabled peers, instead of being educated in separate facilities.

The good news . . .

- **The percentage of children with disabilities who attend regular schools with non-disabled children has grown rapidly and is now almost universal.** In 1970, an estimated 20% of children with disabilities were being educated in regular schools. In 1976-77, after P.L. 94-142 had taken effect, about 93% of children with disabilities were educated in regular public schools. By 1997-98, this percentage had risen to 96%.

- **Only a tiny percentage of children with disabilities are educated in residential or separate facilities.** In 1967, an estimated 200,000 children with disabilities were housed in state institutions, including the majority of children with developmental delays. By 1997-98, the number living in residential facilities had dropped to about 39,000, or less than 1% of all children with disabilities. Another 3% of children with disabilities were being educated in separate day facilities, hospitals, or home settings. So altogether, 4% of children with disabilities are being educated in either residential or separate facilities, down from 6% in 1988. The children served in these separate environments tend to have severe disabilities, such as serious emotional disturbance, hearing impairments, mental retardation, and autism.

Percentage of children with disabilities being educated in regular schools



Percentage of children with disabilities being educated in residential or separate facilities

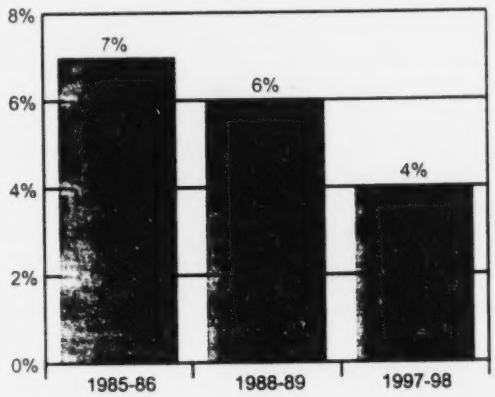


Chart sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000 and *Second Annual Report*, 1980; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *The Condition of Education 2001* and *The Condition of Education 1999*.

Other source: U.S. Department of Education, IDEA 25th Anniversary Web Site.

Indicator 3

Inclusion in Regular Classrooms

Three-Quarters of Students with Disabilities Are Being Educated in Regular Education Classrooms with Non-disabled Children for a Significant Part of the School Day.

Twenty-five years ago, most children with disabilities were segregated from their peers who were not disabled, either because they didn't attend school at all or because they were educated in separate classrooms or buildings. Today, most students with disabilities spend at least 40% of the school day in regular education classrooms alongside non-disabled children.

The good news . . .

- **Students with disabilities are spending more time in regular education classrooms than they did a decade ago.** In 1988-89, about 31% of students with disabilities spent at least 80% of the school day in regular education classrooms. By 1997-98, about 46% of students with disabilities spent 80% of the day in regular classrooms. Another 29% of students with disabilities spent at least 40% of the day in regular classrooms. So altogether, three-fourths of students with disabilities are being educated in regular classrooms for much of the school day.

- **Fewer children are spending a major part of the day in separate classes.** In 1988-89, about one-fourth of all students with disabilities spent 40% or more of the school day in resource rooms or separate classes and the rest of their time in regular classrooms. By 1997-98, only about one-fifth of students with disabilities spent 40% or more of their day in resource rooms or separate classrooms.

- **Placements vary depending on the type and severity of disability.** Students with speech/language impairments or with specific learning disabilities have high rates of participation in regular education classrooms. Students with multiple disabilities, mental retardation, and autism are among the least likely to be placed in regular classrooms for a significant part of the day.

Percentage of students with disabilities ages 6-21 placed in various learning environments, 1988-89 and 1997-98

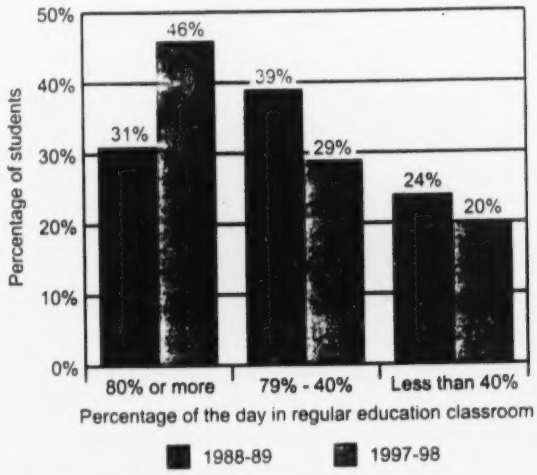


Chart source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. *The Condition of Education 2001.*

Indicator 4

Services to Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Many More Infants, Toddlers, and Young Children with Disabilities Are Receiving Early Intervention and Preschool Services.

Research shows that the earlier children at risk of disabilities are identified and served, the better their chances of success in school. In the 1970s, very little was being done to identify and serve infants and toddlers with disabilities. Although some preschoolers with disabilities were being served through Head Start and similar programs, funding for this age group was limited, too.

During the past 25 years, services to children with disabilities ages 0 through 5 have expanded rapidly. This is largely due to two IDEA programs: the Part C program for infants and toddlers ages 0 through 2, and the Preschool Grants program for children ages 3 through 5.

The Part C program makes funds available to identify infants and toddlers with developmental delays or other disabilities and to provide them with early intervention services that will help them get on the right developmental track. Eligible services include education, therapeutic, and social services, as well as family training and support, special technological devices, and more.

The Preschool Grants program provides funds to states to identify and serve 3- to 5-year-olds with disabilities. Participating states must provide a free, appropriate public education to all eligible children in this age group.

The good news . . .

- **The number of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers served through federally-supported special education programs has more than tripled in 25 years.** In 1973-74, roughly 250,000 children with disabilities ages 0 through 5 were being served through federal special education programs, with most of these children in the upper end of the age bracket. By 1999-2000, the number served had grown to nearly 793,000 children.

- **Since the IDEA early intervention program was created, the number of infants and toddlers served has increased more than sixfold.** In 1987-88, slightly less than 30,000 children with disabilities ages 0 through 2 were being served through the IDEA. By 1999-2000, the number served in this age group had risen to more than 205,000.

- **The number of preschool-aged children being served has grown by about 75% in a little over a decade.** In 1987-88, just under 336,000 children with disabilities ages 3 through 5 were being served through the IDEA. By 1999-2000, the number served in this age group had grown to more than 587,000.

Numbers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers being served through the IDEA

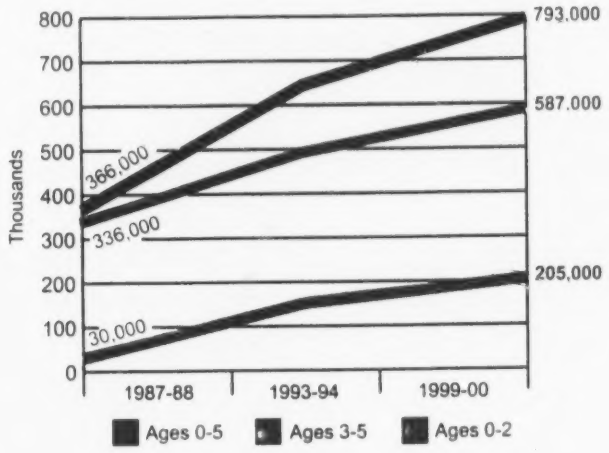


Chart sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000, and *Twentieth Annual Report*, 1998; and U.S. Department of Education, OSEP, Data Analysis System, www.ideadata.org.

Other sources: J. Heumann, Statement on the IDEA before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, January 29, 1997; and U.S. House of Representatives, House Report 94-332 (1975).

Indicator 5

Service Settings for Infants and Toddlers

Most Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Are Being Served Inside the Home Instead of Outside, and Most Preschoolers with Disabilities Are Being Served in Regular Preschool Classrooms with Non-disabled Children.

The IDEA states that to the maximum extent appropriate, early intervention services should be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate. A natural environment is also more conducive to involving the family, which is a critical component of early intervention services. In recent years, most infants and toddlers with disabilities have been served in their homes, rather than in such outside environments as outpatient facilities, classrooms, nursery schools, or hospitals.

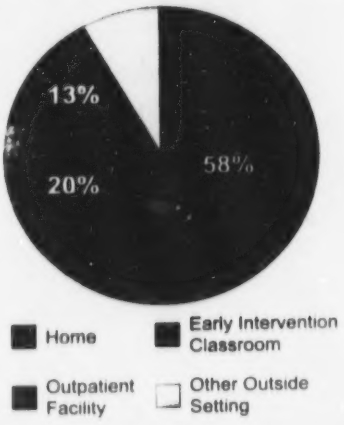
The movement to include students with disabilities in regular classrooms has influenced preschool placements. Over the past decade, the most common setting for preschoolers with disabilities has been the regular preschool classroom.

The good news . . .

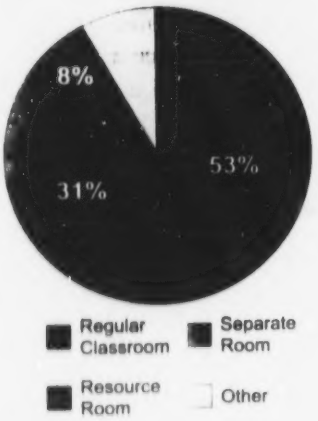
- **More than half of the infants and toddlers with disabilities in the federal early intervention program are being served at home.** In 1997, approximately 58% of the children ages 0 through 2 participating in the IDEA Part C program received services at home. An additional 20% were served in an early intervention classroom, and 13% were served in an outpatient facility. The remaining 8% were served in other settings, such as nursery schools, day care centers, inpatient hospitals, and residential facilities.

- **More preschoolers are learning in regular preschool classrooms with non-disabled children.** Between 1988-89 and 1997-98, the percentage of preschoolers with disabilities served in regular preschool classrooms increased from 42% to 53%. The remainder were served in separate rooms (31%), resource rooms (8%), and other settings (8%), such as separate schools, residential facilities, homes, or hospitals.

Service settings for children with disabilities ages 0-2, 1997-98



Service settings for children with disabilities ages 3-5, 1997-98



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Chart source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000.

Indicator 6

Participation in State Testing

More Students with Disabilities Are Participating in the Same State Testing Programs As Non-disabled Students.

Although tests are a primary tool for measuring academic progress, students with disabilities have historically been excluded from large-scale assessments. Conventional test formats may be difficult or impossible for some students with disabilities to see, read, understand, write on, or respond to. Tests designed for the general population may provide very little useful information about the progress of students at the low end of the score distribution, such as those with mental retardation or other disabilities that affect cognitive functions. In some cases, states and school districts excluded or discouraged students with disabilities from participating in assessments because they were afraid it would lower their average scores or were unsure whether it was acceptable to modify a test format to make it more accessible to these students.

Achievement tests, and especially state assessments, are playing a larger role than ever in education reform. Increasingly, states are using their own assessments to determine whether students are meeting academic standards and to make important decisions, such as whether students will graduate or be promoted to the next grade. States are also using test results to judge the effectiveness of schools and identify low-performing schools. In this climate, it is especially critical that students with disabilities participate in state testing whenever possible.

The IDEA and other federal laws now require students with disabilities to be included in general state and district assessments to the extent possible. When students with disabilities are held to the same standards and take the same tests as non-disabled students, it can raise expectations for their learning and expand their access to the general curriculum. It also provides a more accurate picture of how well schools are helping *all* students reach common academic standards.

Many students with disabilities need modifications of test procedures, or "accommodations," to take standardized tests in a fair and inclusive way. Examples of accommodations include one-on-one testing, small-group testing, extended time, use of magnifying equipment, and use of readers, signers, or transcribers. The IDEA requires states to offer appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities where necessary. Even with accommodations, some students with disabilities will not be able to participate meaningfully in conventional assessments. To determine the progress of these students, states and school districts must develop alternate types of assessment, such as rating scales and portfolios of student work.

The good news . . .

- **More students with disabilities are taking state tests.** On a 2001 survey by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), 60% of the states reported that the participation rates of students with disabilities on their state assessments had gone up compared with previous years. Another 26% of the states said their rates had remained about the same. Only 2% (one state out of the 50) said that its participation rate had gone down. In 12% of the states, data comparing participation with previous

years were not yet available. A similar survey in 1999 also asked states to report specific percentages of students with disabilities participating in state assessments. In 19 of the 23 states providing these data, over 50% of students with disabilities were participating in state assessments, and in 10 of these states, the average participation rates exceeded 80%. With states phasing in new requirements and new assessments, the participation rates of students with disabilities have increased and should continue to do so.

- **State assessment policies have become more inclusive.** All states now offer assessment accommodations for students receiving special education services.

Percentage of states reporting various changes in the participation of students with disabilities in state assessments

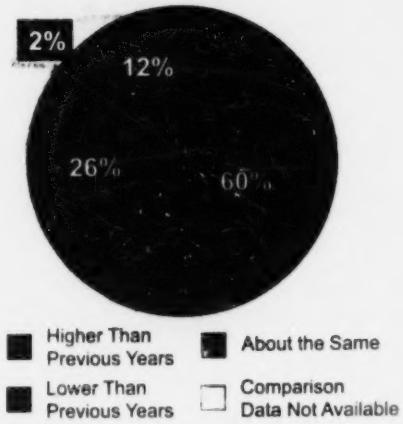


Chart source: S. Thompson & M. L. Thurlow, NCEO, *2001 State Special Education Outcomes*.

Other sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-first Annual Report*, 1999; and S. Thompson & M. L. Thurlow, NCEO, *1999 State Special Education Outcomes*.

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Indicator 7

Performance on State Assessments

Students with Disabilities Are Performing Better or at Stable Levels on Most State Assessments.

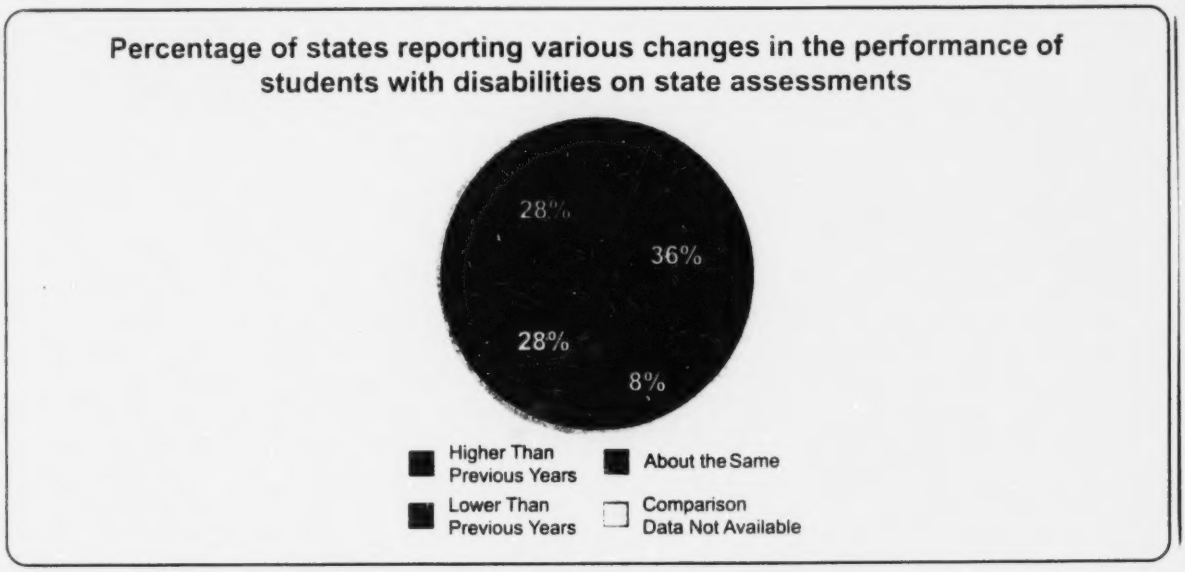
Very little national data are available about academic achievement trends for students with disabilities. These students are just beginning to participate to any notable degree in large-scale testing programs, and some states do not yet have the data to track their performance over time. Even when students with disabilities do take these tests, data on their performance as a group are often not reported. In some cases, the number of students with disabilities taking the test is so small that average scores would not be valid. More importantly, the population of students with disabilities is so diverse, and decisions about testing accommodations are so individualized, that average scores may not provide reliable or useful generalizations about the performance of students with disabilities as a group.

The limited small-scale studies available indicate that students with disabilities achieve at lower levels, on average, than non-disabled students. This is not surprising, given that a large number of these students have specific learning disabilities or other disabilities that make academic areas a challenge. Also, before the 1997 amendments to the IDEA, many students with disabilities did not have access to the general curriculum. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that some students with disabilities score at very high levels.

As more students with disabilities participate in state assessments, some positive trends in achievement are beginning to emerge.

The good news . . .

- **In about two-thirds of the states, the performance of students with disabilities on state tests has gone up or remained stable in recent years.** According to the annual surveys of the National Center on Educational Outcomes, the performance of students with disabilities on state assessments has increased in 28% of the states, remained about the same in 36% of the states, and decreased in 8% of the states. Because state policies for including students with disabilities are so new, 28% of the states do not yet have data comparing their performance with previous years.



Source: S. Thompson & M. L. Thurlow, NCEO, *2001 State Special Education Outcomes.*

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Indicator 8

Participation in National Assessments

More Students with Disabilities Are Taking the Achievement Tests of the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only ongoing national assessment that tracks student achievement in core academic subjects. Students are tested at grades 4, 8, and 12 in reading, math, science, and other core subjects. Although NAEP does not report individual student scores and does not use test scores to make "high stakes" judgments about students or teachers, it is critically important that students with disabilities participate in this nationally representative report card of what American students know and can do.

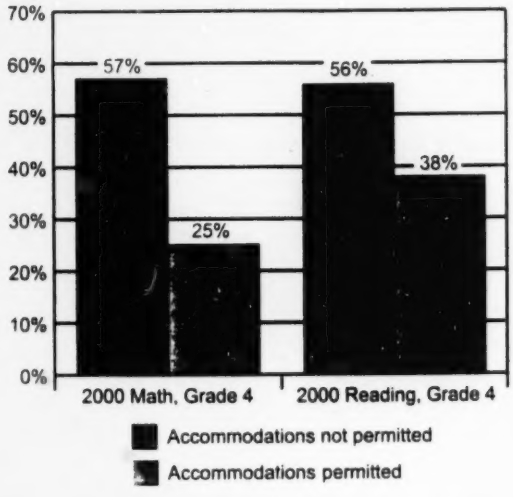
In 1996, NAEP revised its criteria to clarify that students with disabilities should be included, except in limited cases. NAEP has also piloted the use of accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners (together referred to as special needs students in NAEP reports). In recent assessments, NAEP has set up two comparison groups—schools that did not permit accommodations for special-needs students, and schools that permitted accommodations for these students only when necessary for them to participate—and has compared the two sets of results.

The good news . . .

- **The NAEP experience shows that appropriate accommodations can increase the participation of students with disabilities.** In the 2000 NAEP mathematics assessment, between 55% and 57% of students with disabilities were excluded from testing when accommodations were *not* permitted, depending on the grade level tested. When accommodations *were* permitted, this exclusion rate dropped to between 25% and 33%, depending on grade level. In the 2000 NAEP reading assessment, which tested only 4th graders, 56% of students with disabilities were excluded when accommodations were not permitted, compared with a 38% exclusion rate when accommodations were permitted.

- **The NAEP experience suggests that the use of accommodations does not make a large difference in the overall average scores.** One might expect overall test scores to drop significantly if the test-taking population includes a larger share of students with disabilities and English language learners, groups that tend to score lower on achievement tests. But this has not happened in NAEP. On the 2000 math test, the differences in average scores between the "no accommodations" group and the "accommodations-permitted" group were either very similar (grade 12), or so small as to not be statistically significant (grades 4 and 8). On the 2000 reading test for 4th graders, the average score was just slightly lower for the "accommodations-permitted" group.

Percentage of students with disabilities excluded from NAEP testing when accommodations are or are not permitted



NAEP national average scale scores for all students tested in grades 4, 8, and 12 math, and grade 4 reading when accommodations are not permitted for students with disabilities and English language learners, and when accommodations are permitted.

Grade 4	Accommodations not permitted	Accommodations permitted
1996 Math	224	224*
2000 Math	228	226*
1998 Reading	217	216*
2000 Reading	217	215
Grade 8		
1996 Math	272	271*
2000 Math	275	274*
Grade 12		
1996 Math	304	302
2000 Math	301	300*

* Score difference from sample where accommodations were not permitted is *not* statistically significant.

Table sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), *The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2000* (Washington, DC: NCES, 2001); and U.S. Department of Education, NAEP, *The Nation's Report Card: Fourth-Grade Reading 2000* (Washington, DC: NCES, 2001).

Other source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-first Annual Report to Congress*, 1999.

Indicator 9

College Entrance Exams

More Students with Disabilities Are Taking the SAT and ACT College Entrance Exams.

Historically, very few students with disabilities have taken the SAT or ACT college entrance exams. Many students with disabilities who could have succeeded in college were not channeled into an academic curriculum, nor were they encouraged to take these tests.

In recent years, the College Board, which sponsors the SAT, and ACT, Inc. have adopted more inclusive policies and explicit guidelines about when students with disabilities may be offered test accommodations and who can take the test under non-standard conditions. These efforts seem to be paying off, because the numbers and percentages of test-takers with disabilities are increasing.

The SAT and ACT do not generally report average test scores for students with disabilities as a subgroup. This type of average score would not be reliable because the population of test-takers with disabilities is small and very diverse and because decisions about testing accommodations are highly individualized.

The good news . . .

- **The proportion of students with disabilities taking the SAT has grown in recent years.** In 1993, about 1.2% of all SAT test-takers took the test under non-standard conditions; by 2001, the proportion had risen to 1.9%. Most of this growth had occurred by 1996, following revisions in the guidelines for taking the test under non-standard conditions. (Non-standard conditions almost always involve an accommodation or modification for students with disabilities.) The sheer number of students with disabilities taking the SAT has also increased.

- **The estimated percentage of students with disabilities taking the ACT has gone up during the past decade.** The percentage of students who took the ACT test under extended time conditions increased from about 1% in 1990 to almost 3% in 2000. (Test-takers who use the extended time option are generally students with disabilities. But the total percentage of students with disabilities taking the ACT is probably higher, because these students can also opt to take the test under standard conditions or to take it with certain other accommodations that don't require extended time.)

Percentage of students taking the SAT who had disabilities

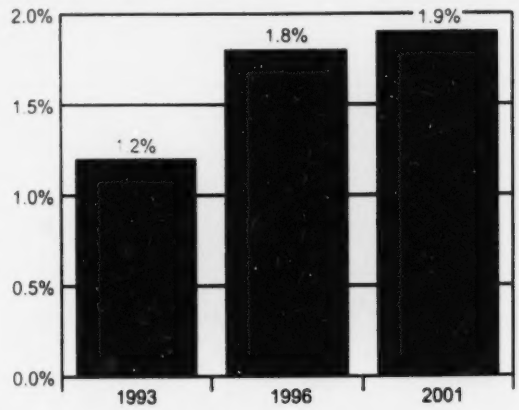


Chart source: The College Board. "SAT Services for Students with Disabilities," cited in E. B. Mandinach, C. Cahalan, & W. J. Camara, "The Impact of Flagging on the Admissions Process: Policies, Practices, and Implications," Educational Testing Service, in press; and personal communication, B. Robinson, The College Board, November 2, 2001.

Other source: ACT, Inc., R. Ziomek, Research Division, personal communication, October 25, 2001.

Indicator 10

High School Graduation

More Students with Disabilities Are Graduating from High School, and Fewer Are Dropping Out.

Graduating from high school has always been an important goal for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who complete high school are more likely to be employed, enroll in postsecondary education or training, and earn higher wages. High school graduation has become an even more critical benchmark as states stiffen their requirements for a regular diploma (as opposed to the less rigorous certificates of completion that some students with disabilities earn).

There are various ways to calculate graduation rates, each with its limitations. One way is to compare the number of students with disabilities who receive a high school diploma in a given year with the number of students with disabilities who exit the educational system that year, whether by graduating with a diploma, receiving a certificate of completion, or dropping out. (The following graph reflects this method.) Another way is to compare the number of students with disabilities who receive a diploma in a given year with the *total* number of students with disabilities ages 17 and older. (By this method, the graduation rate for 1997-98 would be 26%.)

Yet another method is to survey a representative sample of adults with disabilities, asking them whether they have graduated from high school. Using this approach, the National Organization on Disability (N.O.D.)/ Harris 2000 survey found that 78% of adults with disabilities said they had completed high school. This method has the advantage of picking up adults who earned a GED after they left school but also has the weaknesses typically associated with self-reported data.

The good news . . .

- **The percentage of students with disabilities graduating with a diploma has risen slowly but steadily in recent years.** According to the U.S. Department of Education, a record 55.4% of students with disabilities who exited the educational system in 1997-98 graduated with a high school diploma. This continues a four-year rise from the rate of 51.7% in 1993-94.

- **High school completion rates vary by disability.** Students with speech or language impairments, specific learning disabilities, and visual impairments are among the most likely to finish high school. Those with mental retardation, multiple disabilities, and autism are among the least likely.

- **The percentage of adults with disabilities who report that they completed high school increased significantly between 1986 and 2000.** In the 2000 N.O.D./Harris survey, 78% of adults with disabilities said they had graduated from high school, compared with 61% of adults with disabilities in 1986.

- **The "education gap" between adults with disabilities and those without seems to be shrinking.** In the 1986 N.O.D./Harris survey, there was a 24 percentage point difference in high school completion rates between adults with disabilities and those without; in other words, 61% of adults with disabilities said they had completed high school, versus 85% of non-disabled adults. By 2000, this gap had shrunk to 13 percentage points, with 78% of adults with disabilities saying they had completed high school, versus 91% of non-disabled adults.

- **Dropout rates have gone down for students with disabilities.** In 1997-98, the dropout rate for students with disabilities was 31%, a decrease from the 1993-94 rate of 35%.

Percentage of students with disabilities leaving the education system with a high school diploma

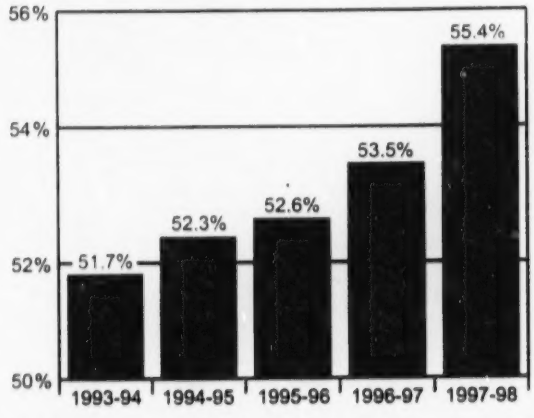


Chart source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, "Education Department Celebrates IDEA 25th Anniversary: Progress Continues for Students with Disabilities," press release, November 29, 2000.

Other sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000 and *Nineteenth Annual Report*, 1997; and National Organization on Disability, "Education and Disability Statistics: A Historical Perspective," and "Educational Levels of People with Disabilities," both excerpted from *N.O.D./Harris 2000 Survey of Americans with Disabilities* (2001).

Indicator 11

Postsecondary Enrollment and Persistence

More Students with Disabilities Are Going On to Postsecondary Education.

Before the IDEA, very few students with disabilities went on to postsecondary education. Many schools did not encourage these students to take an academic curriculum or aim for higher education. Over the past two decades, however, increasing numbers of students with disabilities have entered colleges and other postsecondary institutions. High school academic preparation is a critical factor in college attendance. Students with disabilities who are well-qualified for college are about as likely to enroll in postsecondary education as non-disabled students with similar qualifications.

Since 1997, the IDEA has required schools to develop transition plans for students with disabilities by age 14. These plans spell out post-high school goals for each student in such areas as postsecondary education, employment, and independent living, and also specify services to be provided to help students reach their goals. This requirement should prompt teachers and counselors to pay more attention to college preparation when planning a student's high school course work.

Although students with disabilities have lower rates of college completion than non-disabled students (see The Work Ahead, p. 45), many do persist in higher education. Long-term trends in college completion for students with disabilities are unclear because reliable data are scarce.

The good news . . .

- **The percentage of college freshmen with a disability has more than tripled in 20 years.** According to the surveys of college freshmen conducted by the HEATH Resource Center, the share of college freshmen who self-reported that they had a disability increased from just under 3% in 1978 to somewhat over 9% in 1998. A 1999 study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education found that about 6% of all *undergraduates* (not just freshmen, as in the HEATH survey) reported having a disability in 1995-96.

- **Learning disabilities are the most common type of disability reported by college students.** Orthopedic, health, visual, and hearing impairments are other reported disabilities.

- **Students with disabilities are more likely to attend two-year than four-year colleges.** According to a 1999 U.S. Department of Education study, 45% of postsecondary students with disabilities attended public two-year institutions (mostly community colleges), while 42% went to public or private four-year institutions. The remaining 13% attended other kinds of less than four-year institutions.

- **More than half the students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary education stay with it.** The most recent national data come from a 1994 analysis sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Within five years of starting postsecondary education, 41% of students with disabilities had earned a degree or credential, and another 12% were still enrolled—in other words, 53% persisted in their higher education.

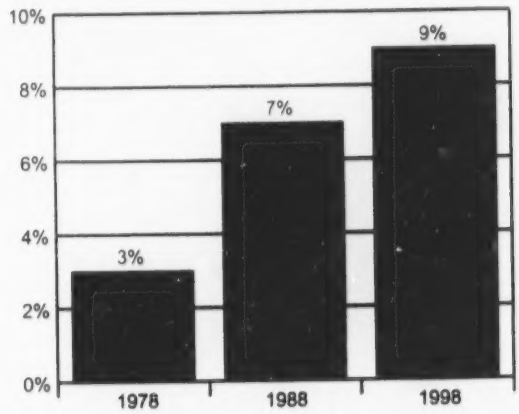


Chart source: HEATH Resource Center, American Council on Education, *College Freshmen with Disabilities: A Biennial Statistical Profile*, 1999.

Other source: L. Horn & J. Berktold, *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation, and Outcomes*, U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 1999.

Indicator 12

College Services

Colleges and Universities Are Providing Services to Help Students with Disabilities Succeed.

Under the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, educational institutions that receive federal aid must provide access and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Recent data show that higher education institutions have taken steps to enhance access for these students.

The good news . . .

- **Nearly all public postsecondary institutions enroll students with disabilities.** In 1997-98, about 98% of public two-year and four-year institutions enrolled students with disabilities. When private institutions were included in the total, the enrollment rate of students with disabilities was 72%.

- **Virtually all postsecondary institutions that enroll students with disabilities provide supports to help them succeed.** About 98% of the institutions enrolling students with disabilities provided at least one special support service or accommodation, such as specialized tutorial services, alternative exam formats, tutors, or readers. Faculty in these institutions also had ready access to materials, workshops, and other activities to help them work with students with disabilities. Public institutions were more likely than private institutions to provide special support services for these students.

Selected services or accommodations offered by postsecondary institutions enrolling students with disabilities in either 1996-97 or 1997-98

Service or accommodation	Percentage of institutions offering
Alternative exam formats	88%
Tutors	77%
Readers, notetakers, scribes	69%
Registration assistance or priority registration	62%
Adaptive equipment or technology	58%
Textbooks on tape	55%

Table source: L. Lewis & E. Farris, "An Institutional Perspective on Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education," *Education Statistics Quarterly*, NCES, Fall 1999.

Other sources: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *The Condition of Education 2000*; and Horn & Berktold, *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*, 1999.

Indicator 13

Employment Outcomes

Employment Rates Have Improved for Young Adults with Disabilities.

A major objective of special education is to prepare students with disabilities for productive jobs. Historically, individuals with disabilities are less likely to be employed than the overall population, and they have lower earnings, on average. The good news is that employment rates are rising among young adults with disabilities, which suggests that the IDEA has had an impact.

The good news . . .

- **Younger adults with disabilities, who attended school when the IDEA was in place, are employed at a higher rate than their older counterparts who generally did not have the benefits of the IDEA.** According to 1997 data from the Census Bureau, 59% of adults with disabilities ages 21-34 were employed, compared with 55% of adults with disabilities ages 35-54, and 36% of those 55 and older. Among people with severe disabilities, these age-group differences are even more apparent. This employment trend is especially noteworthy because for people *without* disabilities, employment rates are *lower* for the 21-34 age group than for the 35-54 age group.

- **Employment rates have gone up over the past 14 years for adults with disabilities who say they are able to work.** Among this group, employment rates rose from 46% in 1986 to 56% in 2000, according to the N.O.D./Harris surveys.

- **Students with disabilities who earn a bachelor's degree fare almost as well in the job market as degree holders who are not disabled.** In 1994, about 67% of the young adults with disabilities who had a bachelor's degree were working full-time. This is close to the 73% employment rate for non-disabled young adults with the same degree. The average annual salaries of the two groups were also similar.

Employment rates for adults with disabilities, 1997

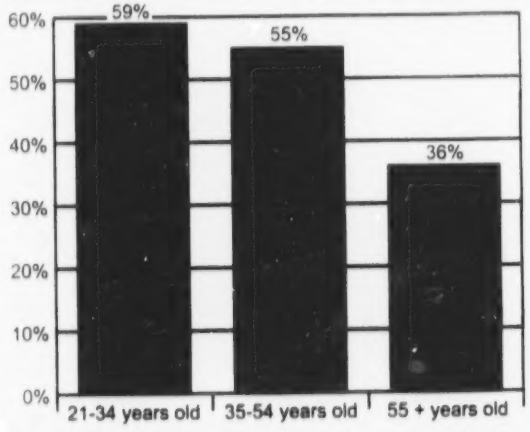


Chart source: J. McNeil, U.S. Census Bureau, "Employment, Earnings, and Disability," paper prepared for the annual conference of the Western Economic Association International, June 29-July 3, 2000, tables B2-B5, data from the 1997 Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Other sources: National Organization on Disability, "Employment Rates of People with Disabilities," excerpted from *N.O.D./Harris 2000 Survey of Americans with Disabilities*; and Horn & Berktold, *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*, 1999.

Indicator 14

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

The Number of Special Education Teachers Has More Than Doubled Over Two Decades, and Many More Regular Classroom Teachers Are Being Trained to Work with Children with Disabilities.

The quality of services to children with disabilities depends on well-trained teachers. Since 1959, the federal government has provided some type of funding to prepare special education teachers, an investment that built the foundation of the special education teaching force. By 1968, an estimated 40% of special education personnel had been trained with federal assistance.

The number of special education teachers has expanded greatly since then, although the supply still falls short of the huge demand (see The Work Ahead). In recent years, preparation and professional development programs for regular classroom teachers have placed more emphasis on helping these teachers work with children with disabilities.

The good news . . .

- **The special education teaching force has more than doubled in two decades.** In 1976-77, there were about 331,000 special education teachers and related services personnel. By 1997-98, there were more than 800,000.

- **Pupil-teacher ratios in special education have decreased.** In 1977, there were 21 pupils with disabilities for every 1 special education teacher. In 1994, this ratio was 16 pupils per special education teacher.

- **Professional development is preparing regular education teachers to better serve children with disabilities.** In 1998, 48% of all teachers participated in professional development activities related to teaching students with disabilities. Among those teachers who spent more than eight hours in professional development on this issue, 42% said these activities improved their classroom teaching "a lot."

Number of special education teachers and related services personnel

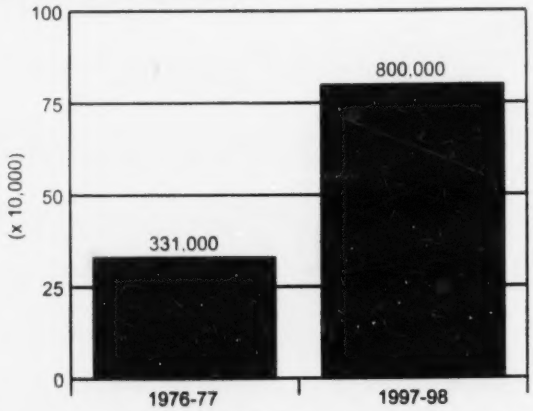


Chart sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000 and *Twenty-first Annual Report*, 1999.

Other sources: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *The Condition of Education 1998* and *The Condition of Education 2000;* and *IDEA 25th Anniversary Web Site*.

Indicator 15

Parents' Involvement

The Majority of Parents of Children with Disabilities Are Actively Involved in Their Child's Education.

Prior to 1975, many parents of children with disabilities had little say in decisions about their child's education. Parents were among the most passionate early champions of rights for children with disabilities. Today, the IDEA spells out the rights of parents of children with disabilities and gives them a strong role in decision making. Many parents also continue to be tireless disability advocates at the grassroots level.

Parents play another critical role by working with children with disabilities at home. Studies show that when parents help with homework or do other kinds of learning activities at home, children with disabilities can develop more regular study habits, improve their skills and knowledge, gain confidence in their own ability, and develop more positive attitudes about school.

The good news . . .

- **More than 85% of parents who had children with disabilities in grades preschool through 4 were actively involved in IEP meetings and other aspects of their child's education.** Examples of active involvement, as cited in a 1994 survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, included understanding the purpose of the IEP meeting, offering information about their child's strengths and needs, listening to the recommendations of school personnel, telling the teachers what they wanted their children to learn, and signing the IEP. More than 70% of the parents surveyed also said that they often talked to teachers about their child's progress, received information about how to teach their child at home, and received information about their legal rights.

- **More than three-fourths of parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities were involved in early intervention programs in significant ways.** For example, 89% of these parents said they helped to make decisions about their child's program, 83% transported their child to treatment, 76% did some therapy for their child, and 75% advocated for their child's rights and their own rights.

- **Thousands of parents each year receive training and information through federally-funded parent training and resource centers.** To help strengthen parent knowledge about programs and services, the U.S. Department of Education supports over 90 Parent Training and Information Centers and more than a dozen Community Parent Resource Centers. These centers help parents of children with disabilities become more effective advocates and partners in their child's learning.

How parents are most involved in their children's education

At least 85% of parents of children with disabilities in grades preschool through 4 were actively involved in IEP meetings. For example, these parents:

- Understood the purpose of the IEP meeting
- Offered information about their child's strengths and needs
- Listened to the recommendations of school personnel
- Told the teachers what they wanted their children to learn
- Signed the IEP

At least 70% of the parents of children with disabilities in grades preschool through 4 said that they:

- Often talked to teachers about their child's progress
- Received information about how to teach their child at home
- Received information about their legal rights

Table source: M. M. Plunge & T. R. Kratochwill, "Parental knowledge, involvement, and satisfaction with their child's special education services," *Special Services in the Schools*, Vol. 10, 1995, cited in U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-first Annual Report*, 1999.

Other source: U.S. Department of Education, IDEA 25th Anniversary Web Site.

Indicator 16

Other Types of Progress

The National Commitment to Improve Special Education Has Brought Many Benefits That Cannot Be Quantified to Children with Disabilities and Others.

Some of the most notable outcomes of the IDEA cannot be put into numbers. The national effort to improve special education has helped both children with disabilities and other Americans.

The good news . . .

- **Attitudes have changed about people with disabilities.** By going to school together, children with and without disabilities have learned values of respect, cooperation, and appreciation of each individual's worth. Surveys of student attitudes show that learning in regular classrooms has helped children with disabilities gain greater acceptance among their non-disabled peers.

- **People with disabilities have become more empowered.** The IDEA and other federal laws have changed the relationship of government toward people with disabilities from caretaker to door opener, and have sensitized the general public to issues of discrimination against individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities have gained confidence about their own futures and today can be found participating in every type of career and in the full range of human activities.

- **Inclusive classrooms can bring educational benefits to both students with disabilities and non-disabled students.** Children with disabilities gain access to a richer academic curriculum, are held to higher expectations, and have more opportunities to improve their communication skills and develop friendships. Many non-disabled students can also benefit from teaching methods used in special education. For example, many non-disabled students learn better when teachers provide them with models of reasonable ways to solve problems, demonstrate step-by-step procedures, provide opportunities for review and practice, and encourage them to explain how they did something.

- **Technologies developed with federal support have helped millions of people with disabilities learn better and function more effectively.** Technology can help people with disabilities read books, understand the spoken word, become more mobile, and communicate more effectively. Early examples of federally-supported technologies include captioned films for the hearing impaired and Braille readers. Current "assistive technologies" range from such low-tech devices as pencil grips and adaptive scissors, to such high-tech applications as computerized voice recognition systems.

- **Many non-disabled Americans have also benefitted from technologies developed for individuals with disabilities.** For example, captioning for the hearing-impaired has been a boon for older Americans and a resource for students and adults who are learning English as a second language. The Kurzweil Reader, a device developed to translate written text into Braille and speech for the visually-impaired, was the forerunner of the fax machine. Software designed for students with learning disabilities now helps all Internet users move to a new link by clicking on highlighted text.

Sources: D. Fisher, "According to Their Peers: Inclusion as High School Students See It," *Mental Retardation*, vol. 37, Dec. 1999; G. McGregor & R. T. Vogelsberg, *Inclusive Schooling Practices: A Synthesis of the Literature That Informs Best Practices about Inclusive Schooling* (Pittsburgh: Allegheny University of the Health Sciences, 1998); U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Nineteenth Annual Report*, 1997; and C. Parks, "Closed Captioned TV: A Resource for ESL Literacy Education," *ERIC Digest*, 1994.

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PART 3

THE WORK AHEAD FOR EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

As illustrated in The Good News section of this report, the national commitment to special education has spurred progress on several fronts. The goal of providing access has been largely met, but the task of educating students with disabilities is far from complete. A candid, data-based review of the challenges, gaps, and problems in special education reveals several areas where more work is needed. These challenges form a work agenda for the next decade.

This section presents data on 10 major challenges for special education in the coming years. To help readers put these indicators in context, we offer three broad observations about the work ahead in special education.

Broad observations . . .

1. **It is time for special education to look beyond ensuring access as an endpoint and focus on improving educational quality and results for students with disabilities.** Now that children with disabilities have access to regular education classrooms, the next step is to focus more attention on the knowledge and skills they are learning and the quality of preparation they are receiving in those classrooms. Much work remains to be done to ensure that all students with disabilities receive a high-quality education that prepares them for postsecondary education, good jobs, and productive independent lives.

2. **Standards-based reform in general education has created new challenges for special education.** The idea that students with disabilities should be held to the same standards and tests as other students sends a powerful, positive signal. But requirements that link promotion and graduation to performance on high-stakes tests could harm students with disabilities. It will take intensive academic support for students, professional development for special education and regular education teachers, and other interventions to help students with disabilities meet academic standards and participate meaningfully in the general curriculum.

3. **It is time to rethink both the requirements and funding levels of the IDEA.** The procedural requirements of the IDEA have been instrumental in ensuring access for students with disabilities. But these requirements place considerable paperwork and time demands on teachers and administrators. And when legal conflicts between parents and schools become very contentious, this can overshadow educational goals and be counterproductive for children. Completing the work ahead, such as raising achievement and improving outcomes for students with disabilities, may be better accomplished with a different balance of policy approaches. It will also require a greater federal contribution; states and localities can't be expected to bear the costs of the work ahead alone.

Challenge 1

Participation in the General Curriculum

We Must Increase Access of Students with Disabilities to the General Curriculum, Academic Courses, and General Assessments.

It is encouraging that students with disabilities are spending more time learning in regular education classrooms. The next step is to place greater emphasis on the curriculum they are learning and the quality of instruction they are receiving in those classrooms. This is especially critical in light of state efforts to hold students with disabilities to the same academic standards as other students.

The work ahead . . .

- **Students with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to take a full academic curriculum in high school.** College freshmen with disabilities in 1998 were less likely than other freshmen to have completed three years of high school math and two years each of a foreign language, physical science, and biological science. In other core subjects, however, their preparation was similar to other freshmen. It seems reasonable to assume that students with disabilities who do not attend college are even less well prepared in academic areas.

Participation in the general curriculum means more than seat time in regular education classrooms. It also means that students with disabilities must have access to the right kinds of instructional materials and to well-trained teachers who know how to teach students with special needs. Increasing the participation of students with disabilities in general assessments must be part of this effort.

Percentage of full-time college freshmen who took core academic courses in high school by disability status, 1998

Subject and recommended number of years	Any disability	No disability reported
Math (3 years)	91%	95%
Foreign languages (2 years)	70%	86%
Physical science (2 years)	43%	47%
Biological science (2 years)	33%	39%
History/American government (1 year)	98%	98%
English (4 years)	95%	97%
Arts and/or music (1 year)	76%	76%
Computer science (1/2 year)	58%	59%

Table source: HEATH Resource Center, *College Freshmen with Disabilities*, 1999.

Challenge 2

Higher Achievement

We Must Improve the Academic Achievement of Students with Disabilities.

Although more children with disabilities are taking standardized achievement tests, as a group they perform at lower than average levels. The next step is to ensure that students with disabilities learn the knowledge and skills expected of all students and improve their performance in core subjects.

The work ahead . . .

- **The limited available data show that students with disabilities achieve at lower levels, on average, than non-disabled students.** Typically, NAEP does *not* report average scores for students with disabilities as a group. Special data from the 1996 math and science assessments of the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that students with an IEP scored significantly lower than those without an IEP. The achievement gap between these two groups was wider in grades 8 and 12 than in grade 4. On the math test, the mean score for students with an IEP was anywhere from 9 to 18% lower than the mean score for students without an IEP, depending on the grade tested and whether accommodations were allowed. In science, the mean score for students with an IEP was 16 to 25% lower than the mean for students without an IEP.

Many students with disabilities will need extra support and intensive interventions to learn the knowledge and skills embodied in state standards. Improving achievement will require instruction that is highly individualized but rooted in techniques that are known to be effective for students with disabilities. It will also require professional development for special education and general classroom teachers.

Mean mathematics scale scores, NAEP 1996
Schools using inclusive eligibility criteria and permitting accommodations

Grade	Students with IEP	Students without IEP
Grade 4	205.5	224.5
Grade 8	234.0	274.9
Grade 12	256.8	303.4

Table source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-first Annual Report*, 1999.

Note: The 1996 NAEP scores displayed in the table above are based on different groups of students than the NAEP data shown in Indicator 8 (p. 30), Participation in National Assessments, and that is why they look very different. The 1996 data cited for this Challenge are from a special comparison of students with IEPs and those without. The data in Indicator 8 are from the regular NAEP reports, and they compare the average NAEP scores of *all* students taking the tests – not just students with disabilities or English language learners – under two sets of circumstances: when accommodations are permitted and when accommodations are not permitted.

Challenge 3

Over-representation of Minority Students

We Must Continue to Address the Over-representation of African American Students in Special Education.

African American students are referred to special education at higher rates than their share of the overall population. The over-representation of African American students is especially dramatic among children identified as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. These data raise questions as to whether some minority students are being incorrectly identified as having disabilities. For example, students who are achieving below grade level may be referred to special education, even though they might be better served by academic support programs in general education.

When children are misidentified as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed, it can have negative effects, such as increasing the time spent in separate or segregated settings, diverting them from more appropriate services, stigmatizing them, or discouraging them from trying to achieve. Misclassification also reduces the resources available to serve children with disabilities.

The historical lack of racial/ethnic data has made it difficult to determine to what extent minority students may be over-represented in special education. To monitor this situation, the 1997 IDEA amendments required states to collect and report data on the race and ethnicity of children served.

The work ahead . . .

- **African American and American Indian students are referred to special education at higher rates than their shares of the general population.** In 1998-99, African American students made up 20% of the special education population ages 6-21, although African Americans constituted 15% of the resident population. American Indian students are somewhat over-represented in special education; they comprised 1.3% of the special education population, but 1.0% of the general population.

- **African American students are labeled as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed at much higher rates than students from other racial/ethnic groups.** According to the Department of Education, 2.2% of all African American students, but only 0 8% of all white students are identified as mentally retarded. And 1.3% of all black students but only 0.7% of all white students are identified as emotionally disturbed.

- **For all racial/ethnic subgroups there was some over-representation in certain categories of disability.** Hispanic students are represented in special education at rates similar to their share of the general population. Asian students and white students were under-represented among special education students in 1998.

Experts have suggested several strategies to reduce inappropriate placements in special education. They include expanding intervention programs in preschool and general education, addressing other deficiencies in the school system that may lead to low achievement, and increasing access of poor families to health and social services. Other strategies include providing professional development and other supports to special education and general education teachers to help them work more effectively with a diverse student population; using culturally-relevant assessments and materials; and redefining staff roles to support shared responsibility for all students.

Percentage of students with disabilities from various racial/ethnic groups, compared with the percentage of various racial/ethnic groups in the resident population, 1998-99

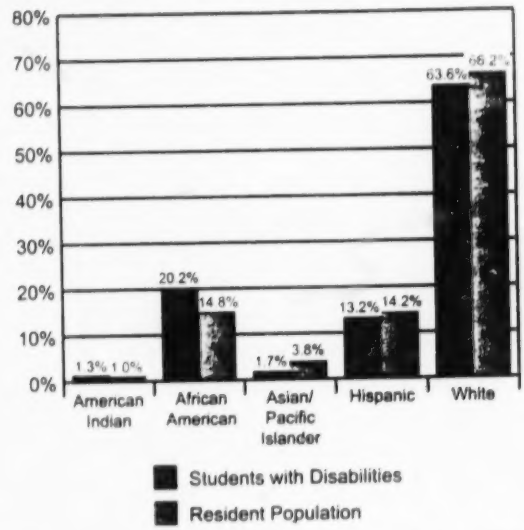

Chart source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000.

Other sources: Testimonies of Secretary R. Paige, the Hon. C. Fattah, and T. Hehir before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing on the Over-identification of Minority Students under the IDEA, October 4, 2001.

Challenge 4

High School Graduation

We Need to Ensure That More Students with Disabilities Graduate from High School.

Despite improvements in their high school graduation rates, students with disabilities are still far less likely to graduate than their non-disabled peers. Graduation rates are even lower for minority students with disabilities. New state high school exit exams have complicated this challenge.

Strong, early transition planning is a vital step toward preventing students with disabilities from dropping out. The IDEA requires IEP teams to develop transition plans that specify the services to be provided to students with disabilities to help them reach their goals for life beyond high school.

The work ahead . . .

- **Young people with disabilities still drop out of high school at twice the rate of their peers.** The dropout rates are even higher for students with severe disabilities.

- **Young people with disabilities are less likely than other students to graduate from high school.** Different calculation methods produce different rates of high school graduation for students with disabilities. In 1997-98, about 55% of students with disabilities who exited the educational system graduated with a regular high school diploma (the rest received a certificate of completion or dropped out). If one compares the number of students with disabilities who received a diploma in 1997-98 with the *total* number of students with disabilities ages 17 through 21, the graduation rate was only 26%. In either case, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is well below the 75% of youth ages 18 through 24 who graduate with a regular diploma. Surveys of adults, which include people who later obtained a GED, show a similar gap. According to the 2000 N.O.D./Harris survey, 78% of adults with disabilities reported having completed high school, compared with 91% of people without disabilities.

- **States with high school exit exams graduate somewhat fewer students with disabilities than states without these tests.** The full impact of exit exams will become more obvious in the next few years, as more states implement high-stakes testing.

For some students with disabilities, high-quality vocational training can increase their chances of completing high school. Other approaches to help students with disabilities stay in school include monitoring student behavior, building relationships with caring adults and other students, teaching problem solving, and modeling persistence. States and school districts must also pay greater attention to the needs of students with disabilities when implementing new standards and assessments.

Percentage of adults who say they completed high school, 2000

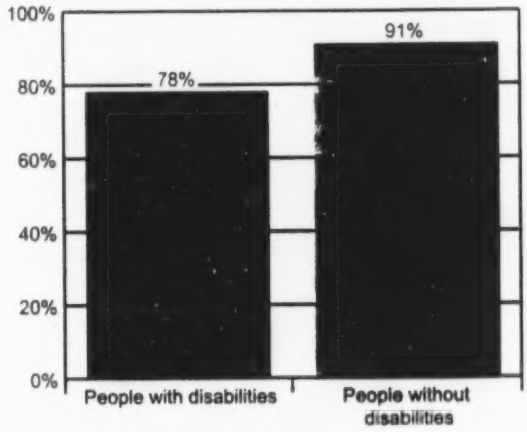

Chart source: National Organization on Disability, "Education Levels of People with Disabilities," excerpted from *N.O.D./Harris 2000 Survey of Americans with Disabilities.*

Other sources: W. Clinton, "Remarks by the President at Signing Ceremony for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," June 4, 1997, www.ed.gov; U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *Dropout Rates in the United States, 1998*, www.ed.gov; National Council on Disability, *Transition and Post-school Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities: Closing the Gaps to Post-secondary Education and Employment* (Washington, DC: NCD and Social Security Administration, 2000); and U.S. Department of Education, *Twenty-first Annual Report*, 1999.

Challenge 5

Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion

We Need to Encourage More Students with Disabilities to Prepare for, Enroll in, and Complete Higher Education.

Although more students with disabilities are going on to postsecondary education, the pace of growth seems to have slowed in recent years, according to the HEATH surveys of college freshman. Furthermore, many students with disabilities who start postsecondary education do not complete a credential or degree.

The work ahead . . .

- **Young people with disabilities are less likely to go on to higher education than non-disabled students.** Two years after completing high school, about 63% of high school graduates with disabilities had enrolled in a postsecondary institution, compared with about 72% of high school graduates without disabilities.

- **Students with disabilities who start postsecondary education are less likely to finish than non-disabled students.** Within 5 years of enrolling in a postsecondary institution, 53% of students with disabilities had attained a degree or vocational certificate or were still enrolled—lower than the comparable figure of 64% for non-disabled students. In the 2000 N.O.D./Harris survey, 12% of people with disabilities reported having graduated from college, compared with 23% of non-disabled adults. For reasons that are unclear, the 2000 rate for adults with disabilities represents a decline from the 1998 rate of 19%.

More extensive efforts are needed to improve transitions from high school to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Examples of services that can be helpful include assistance with planning academic courses or vocational training, work experience, career counseling, mentoring, and coaching. Educators, parents, and others must encourage more students with disabilities to aim for college and take the kinds of academic courses that will give them a solid background.

Percentage of high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education two years later

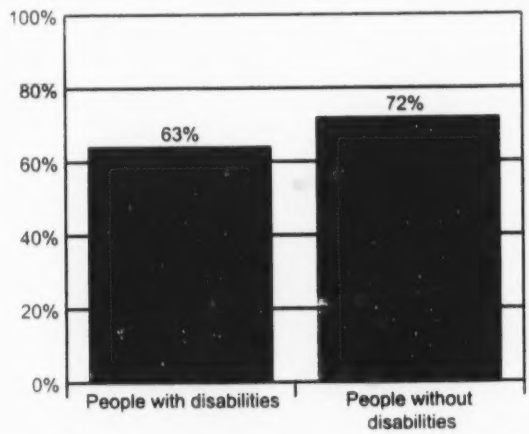

Chart source: Horn & Berktold. *Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education*, 1999.

Other sources: D. Hurst & B. Smerdon, "Postsecondary Students with Disabilities: Enrollment, Services, and Persistence," *Education Statistics Quarterly*, NCES, Fall 2000; and National Organization on Disability, "Education Levels of People with Disabilities" (Washington, DC: N.O.D., 2001).

Challenge 6

Preparation for Employment

We Need to Do More to Prepare Students with Disabilities for Jobs.

Although some young adults with disabilities are making progress in achieving vocational goals, Americans with disabilities have a less secure future than other citizens. Different survey techniques produce different employment rates for adults with disabilities, but all of them show that wide gulfs remain in employment between people with disabilities and those without. Unemployment and underemployment contribute to chronically low earnings for individuals with disabilities.

The work ahead . . .

- **Adults with disabilities are less likely to be employed than people without disabilities.** According to a 1997 survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, 50% of adults with disabilities ages 21-64 were employed, compared with 84% of non-disabled adults. The 2000 N.O.D./Harris survey found an even larger gap: only 32% of adults with disabilities ages 18-64 reported being employed, compared with 81% of non-disabled adults. (The varied responses may be due to differences in how the surveys defined disability and in other research techniques.) Both surveys also show markedly higher unemployment rates for people with disabilities than for others.

- **Adults with disabilities earn less.** In 1997, median earnings for working-age adults with disabilities were $17,700, compared with a median of $23,700 for non-disabled adults.

Efforts must begin in the early years of schooling to help students make a successful transition to meaningful employment and financial independence. Students with disabilities need expanded opportunities in K-12 education to develop their academic and vocational skills and improve their employability skills through social interactions.

Employment rates for adults ages 21-64, 1997

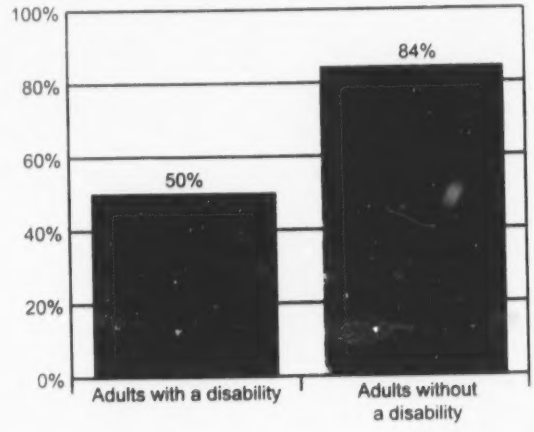

Chart source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Survey of Income and Program Participation*, Table 2: Disability Status, Employment, and Annual Rate of Earnings, www.census.gov.

Other source: National Organization on Disability, "Employment Rates of People with Disabilities," excerpted from *N.O.D./Harris 2000 Survey of Americans with Disabilities.*

Challenge 7

Teacher Development

We Need to Increase the Supply and Improve the Skills of All Teachers Who Work with Students with Disabilities.

Well-prepared teachers are the key to high-quality education. Despite federal and state training programs, the supply of special education teachers is not keeping pace with demand. Too many children with disabilities are already being taught by teachers who are not fully certified in special education.

Both the standards-based reform movement and the trend toward inclusion for students with disabilities have created critical needs for professional development for all teachers. Special education teachers need professional development in such areas as teaching a standards-based curriculum, integrating advanced technologies into their instruction, and addressing the needs of an ethnically and linguistically diverse population. Regular education teachers need professional development in such areas as effectively teaching students with disabilities and helping children with disabilities access technology-based learning tools. Both groups of teachers need information about how to collaborate effectively.

The work ahead . . .

- **Special education teachers, supervisors, and aides are in short supply.** In 1997-98, more than 3,600 full-time positions in special education remained vacant. In large urban districts, shortages have reached critical levels. But most college education majors plan to concentrate in teaching areas other than special education.

- **Many special education teachers are not fully certified.** In school year 1997-98, almost 9% of special education teachers—or more than 30,000 teachers—were not fully certified in special education.

- **Most public school teachers do not feel well prepared to work with children with disabilities.** In 1998, only 21% of public school teachers said they felt very well prepared to address the needs of students with disabilities, and another 41% said they felt moderately well prepared. Thirty percent reported feeling somewhat well prepared, and 7% said they did not feel at all prepared. About half of public school teachers (52%) said they had not participated in *any* professional development during the prior 12 months regarding the needs of students with disabilities.

Some of the strategies being used to prepare, recruit, and retain teachers who work with children with disabilities include partnerships with higher education, co-teaching arrangements that use special education and general education teachers in innovative ways, and assistance to help teachers with emergency certificates become fully certified.

Numbers of teachers providing special education to children with disabilities, school year 1997-98

Fully Certified:	316,600
Not Fully Certified:	30,100
Vacant Positions:	3,600

Table source: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000.

Other sources: Council of the Great City Schools, *The Urban Teacher Challenge* (Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools, 2000); and U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *The Condition of Education 2000* and *The Condition of Education 1999*.

Challenge 8

Paperwork and Procedural Requirements

IDEA Paperwork and Procedural Requirements May Produce Unintended Consequences for Students with Disabilities.

The IDEA has played a critical role in the progress of special education during the past 25 years. But some of the program's requirements are complex, and they create paperwork and time demands that interfere with teachers' ability to deliver effective instruction. This, in turn, is causing some special education teachers to consider leaving the profession. Furthermore, when people look to the legal system as a first resort, relationships between schools and parents can quickly become adversarial, sometimes to the detriment of the child's education.

These trends point to the need to rethink the policy balance in federal law. On one hand, federal policy must assure that children with disabilities are being educated effectively and appropriately, and that parents and children have a recourse when school districts are derelict in carrying out their responsibilities. On the other hand, federal policy must not become so legalistic and paper-driven that it undercuts the goal of a better education for children with disabilities.

The work ahead . . .

- **IDEA paperwork takes time away from important teaching responsibilities.** According to a new federally funded study of special education personnel needs (SPeNSE), the typical special education teacher spends 5 hours per week completing forms and doing administrative paperwork—much higher than the 2 hours per week that the average general education teacher spends on these tasks. Special education teachers spend as much time doing paperwork as they do preparing for lessons. They spend more time on paperwork than their *combined* time spent grading papers, sharing expertise with colleagues, attending IEP meetings, and communicating with parents.

- **IDEA paperwork is a significant factor affecting the decision of special education teachers to leave the profession.** According to the SPeNSE study, 76% of special education teachers who planned to leave teaching as soon as possible said that paperwork interfered with their job of teaching to a *great* extent. This compares with 53% of all special education teachers.

- **Some states and school districts are not fully complying with key IDEA requirements.** Federal and state monitoring reports show that some states and schools districts have problems complying with key requirements, such as including parents in IDEA meetings, placing students appropriately in the least restrictive environment, and providing appropriate transition services to post-high-school activities.

- **Mediation and other less legalistic approaches may help to resolve some types of problems.** Better problem-solving among adults can mean better education for students with disabilities. Some types of disputes may be resolved more effectively through such strategies as mediation or independent facilitators than through lengthy due process hearings. The 1997 IDEA amendments encouraged voluntary use of mediation, and data about the impact of these approaches are just beginning to emerge.

These developments suggest it is time to think seriously about the kinds of policies that are most effective in improving educational quality and ensuring better results for students with disabilities.

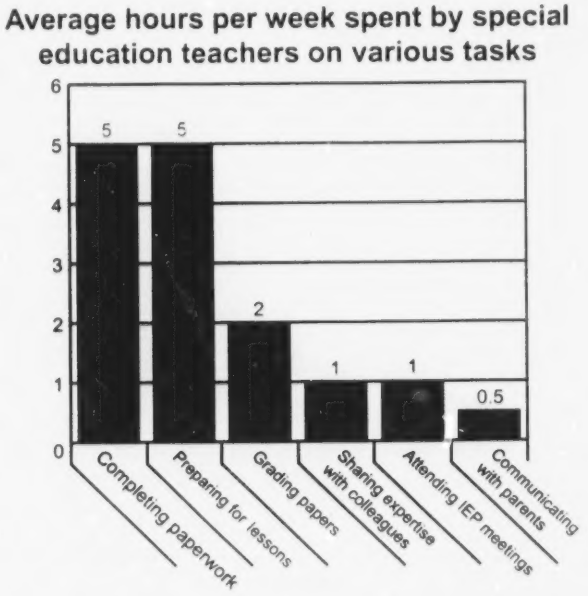

Chart source: E. Carlson, K. Schroll, & S. Klein, Westat, "OSEP Briefing on the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE)," presented August 8, 2001, Washington, DC.

Other sources: Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education, "Fact Sheet: Paperwork in Special Education," October 15, 2001, www.spense.org; U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000 and *Nineteenth Annual Report*, 1997; and National Council on Disability, *National Disability Policy: A Progress Report* (Washington, DC: NCD, 2001).

Challenge 9

Access to Technology

We Must Bridge the "Digital Divide" for Students with Disabilities.

Considerable progress has been made in researching and designing technologies that meet the specific needs of people with disabilities. But students cannot benefit from these technologies unless they have access to them, and many do not.

It is also vital that students with disabilities have access to computer and Internet technologies to the same degree as other students. Not only are computer skills integral to many jobs, but Internet-based technologies can improve the quality of life for many young people with disabilities. They can eliminate transportation barriers, make certain types of classroom materials more accessible, connect students with disabilities to people who share their interests, and allow the students to reveal their disabilities at their discretion. Some students with disabilities may be unable to access these technologies, however, without special devices or support.

The work ahead . . .

- **Many students with disabilities who could benefit from assistive technologies do not have access to them.** Although the IDEA requires the IEP team to consider whether a student with a disability requires assistive technologies, studies suggest these technologies are underused. Many educators and parents are not aware of the range of technologies available. Schools lack funds to buy these products, or else they don't know where to look for them. And merely placing a device in a student's hands is not enough; teachers need to be trained to use these tools appropriately.

- **Various barriers impede students with disabilities from using Internet-based technologies.** In a 1996 survey, 38% of school administrators said they had too few computers with alternative input or output devices for students with disabilities, and 34% said they had too few computers of any kind. The biggest barrier to access was inadequate training in technology for special education teachers; 47% of administrators surveyed said this was a problem. Thirty-nine percent of administrators said their schools had inadequate evaluation and support services to identify and meet the technology needs of students with disabilities.

- **Technology is an area in which special education teachers feel least skillful**. A new national study of special education personnel found that special education teachers felt least skilled in using technology in instruction.

Realizing the potential of technology for students with disabilities will require funding investments, professional development, wider dissemination of research about integrating technologies into special education services, and consideration of students with disabilities in all federal, state, and local technology plans and programs.

Percentage of school administrators reporting moderate or major barriers in access to technologies by students with disabilities

Barriers reported by administrators	Percentage reporting
Special education teachers are not sufficiently trained to use technology	47%
Too few computers available to students with disabilities	34%
Too few computers with alternative input or output devices	36%
Inadequate evaluation and support services to meet special technology needs	39%

Table source: S. Heaviside, et. al., "What Are the Barriers to the Use of Advanced Telecommunications for Students with Disabilities in Public Schools?" *Education Statistics Quarterly*, NCES, Spring 2000.

Other sources: U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, *Twenty-second Annual Report*, 2000; National Organization on Disability, "What Is the Technology Gap?" (Washington, DC: N.O.D., 2001); and Carlson, Schroll & Klein, "OSEP Briefing on the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education," 2001.

Challenge 10

Other Work Ahead

Challenges Remain in Special Education in Such Areas As Parent Involvement, Over-identification of Children with Disabilities, Costs, and Data Collection.

Special education faces numerous challenges in addition to those discussed above. Several more challenges could be mentioned, but we will focus here on four.

The first crucial issue pertains to parent involvement. Not all parents of children with disabilities participate actively in decisions about their child's education, but this doesn't mean they don't care. Several barriers inhibit parent involvement, and these must be addressed.

A second critical issue is whether some students are being inappropriately referred to special education because they are low-achieving rather than because they have a clear learning disability.

A third challenge relates to the costs of special education and the relative responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments to meet those costs.

A fourth challenge is the need for better data. As this report demonstrates, several key policy questions cannot be effectively answered because we lack adequate data in special education.

The work ahead . . .

- **A variety of barriers can impede parents of children with disabilities from actively participating in their child's education**. School personnel may unknowingly inhibit parent involvement if they use jargon or technical language; lack understanding of the parents' language, culture, or ethnic background; appear not to listen to or respect parents; do not effectively explain the purpose of a meeting or the placement or programming options; or subtly discourage questions or differing opinions. Parents may feel inhibited by a lack of understanding about the school system or how to help their child or by their own limited education. External barriers such as work schedules and lack of transportation or child care also hinder parent involvement.

- **A key question is whether schools are inappropriately referring some low-achieving children to special education because that is where resources are available.** This issue becomes particularly hazy in the case of children with specific learning disabilities, the category that has seen the largest growth by far. Some children may achieve below grade level for reasons other than a disability. Depending on which school district they attend, children with similarly chronic achievement problems may be placed in special education, the federal Title I program, or another intervention. Some observers contend that referrals to special education would be reduced, and many low-achieving children would be better served, if early reading intervention and prevention programs were more widely available. These issues are currently a topic of research and policy analysis.

- **The costs of special education raise questions about how to fund it, how to ensure its cost effectiveness, and which levels of government should be responsible.** The costs of special education have risen more rapidly than the costs of education as a whole. States and local school districts have borne most of these additional costs. Many policymakers contend that the federal government should assume greater responsibility for these costs.

- **Better data can help schools make better decisions about serving students with disabilities.** Just a few examples of areas where more data are needed include the academic progress of students with disabilities, the impact of state standards and accountability on these students, the costs and cost effectiveness of special education, and the quality of parental involvement in the education of students with disabilities.

These and other challenges are not unsolvable problems. For example, research has identified strategies that can help overcome barriers to parent participation. Better data and thoughtful policy analysis can help meet such challenges as over-identification. Some challenges will require a serious national discussion among people representing different views.

Sources: S. W. Smith, "Involving Parents in the IEP Process," ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, ERIC Digest E611, June 2001; R. Paige, testimony before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Regarding the Over-identification of Minority Students, October 4, 2001; and G. R. Lyon et al., "Rethinking Learning Disabilities," in *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century*, eds. C. E. Finn, A. J. Rotherham, & C. R. Hokanson, Jr. (Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute and the Thomas R. Fordham Foundation, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The history of special education during the past 25 years shows what Americans can accomplish when we make a national commitment to a goal. The positive outcomes for students with disabilities are the product of active steps by the federal government and earnest efforts by teachers, parents, administrators, and others to make the federal law work.

The nation has met some of the objectives of the IDEA and made notable progress toward others. Good news for students with disabilities can be found in many areas, from inclusion in regular classrooms to high school graduation. Over the years, the IDEA has been revised to respond to new needs, and a solid infrastructure is now in place.

In other aspects of special education, however, the nation has fallen short. We need to strengthen academic achievement for students with disabilities, improve high school completion rates, better prepare students for higher education and productive jobs, simplify federal requirements, and develop an adequate supply of well-qualified teachers. These goals form the core of a work agenda for special education for the coming decade.

The IDEA has served us well. Its guarantees and protections have played a major role in ensuring that students with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education. Now that the goal of access has largely been met, it is time to consider which legislative provisions and policies are best suited to accomplishing the work ahead.

If the nation buckles down to the work ahead with the same energy and sense of purpose that characterized the first 25 years of the IDEA, we can look forward to another era of impressive progress in special education and a brighter future for children with disabilities.

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